DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 543 RC 017 515

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TITLE Project Redesign: A Cooperative School Improvement Program Involving Four Rural School Districts and Texas Tech University.
PUB DATE 10 Oct 89
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Rural Education Association (Reno, NV, October 10, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; *Change Strategies; *College School Cooperation; Cooperative Programs; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Improvement Programs; *Outcomes of Education; *Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School Districts; Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *Texas; Texas Tech University

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a collaborative project involving Texas Tech University personnel and four school districts in a school improvement program. The project was built around an agreement between the university personnel and school districts committing them to the program and using the Outcomes Driven Developmental Model as the basis for action. College personnel provided assistance to districts in understanding and use of the model, as well as technical training and feedback service. The model involves school administration, the board of education, and the schools themselves in promoting student self-esteem, cognitive skills, process skills, self-directed learning, and concern for others. Training sessions were held four times a year for administrators and teachers. Superintendents were involved in planning sessions at least two times a year. At the end of the 3-year program, follow-up activities were planned to allow continued improvement. Evaluation results show that participants were almost unanimous in affirming that the school districts were committed to school improvement using the outcome based development model. Responses to questions about effectiveness were generally positive, although some reservations were expressed. The major difficulties were community understanding and trust, and openness among district staff members. (DHP)

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PROJECT REDESIGN

A COOPERATIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM INVOLVING FOUR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Paper Presented
at the
Annual Conference
National Rural Education Association

Reno, Nevada
October 10, 1989

by

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PROJECT REDESIGN

A COOPERATIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM INVOLVING FOUR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

In September of 1985 faculty members in the department of educational administration at Texas Tech University decided to begin a cooperative program with selected small school districts in the area to help them significantly improve their educational programs. This followed an earlier similar project which over a three-year period of time had achieved limited success. Much was learned in this earlier effort which helped make the second project even more successful.

A letter to a selected group of superintendents invited them to involve their district personnel in a three-year project to collaborate with a limited number of other districts and with university personnel to significantly improve the programs and results in their schools. The letter described in some detail the concepts and procedures which the project would follow. Eight of the invited school superintendents attended an information session to discuss their possible involvement in the project. Four of the districts decided to become involved--Crosbyton, Muleshoe, Olton, and Spur.

The four school districts which chose to become involved in the project are located from 40 to 70 miles from the major city in the area, Lubbock, which is a city of about 200,000 population and the site of Texas Tech University. The enrollment for the four school districts during the school year 1986-87 was as follows;

Crosbyton	626
Muleshoe	1656
Olton	787
Spur	504

Texas Tech University faculty members directly involved were Professors Weldon Beckner, John Champlin, Charles Reavis, and William Sparkman.

The project was built around a proposal developed by the educational administration faculty at Texas Tech University. This statement formed an agreement or commitment on the part of the school districts and Texas Tech personnel. It proved to be a very important element of the project, giving direction and focus to the discussions and actions which ensued. The proposal was stated as follows.

PROJECT REDESIGN

Project Redesign is a collaborative effort at significant school improvement involving volunteer school districts and the faculty in Educational Administration, Texas Tech University.

The basis for action will be the Outcomes Driven Developmental Model. College personnel will provide assistance to districts in their understanding and use of the model. In addition they will provide appropriate technical training and feedback service as required.

All participants agree that:

1. The need for school improvement is on-going at all times. Efforts at intervention will be directed at:
   (a) having all students be successful learners.
   (b) aligning school practices with the most current, appropriate professional literature and successful practice.
2. Improvement will be considered a holistic activity. All aspects of the organization are subject to review and alteration.
3. Current roles and performance expectations will be altered to achieve desired goals.
4. All participants commit to be data driven.
5. The Outcomes Driven Model will be utilized as a management system.

Districts specifically commit to:

1. Make a public commitment to significant school improvement.
2. Work toward a balanced and willing participation of the Board of Education.
3. Establish a need and commit to manage efforts designed to reduce or eliminate any discrepancies between actual practice and program optimums.
4. Participate in all activities deemed essential to reaching established goals.
5. Make appropriate time and support available for necessary staff development.
6. Work cooperatively with fellow participating districts in ways which the total group determines to be important.
7. Publically acknowledge that past practice
   (a) will be examined in light of current professional data.
   (b) will not be offered as a reason for determining appropriate practices for the future.
   (c) will be considered as the most appropriate at an earlier point in time but perhaps currently invalid.
8. District and building leadership which will aggressively model critical behaviors and reflect enthusiasm for a vision of what schools might be.
9. Provide for the project through an annual membership fee of $800 per school district. This will provide five days of training and/or other assistance. Costs for any additional services will be negotiated as needed.

College personnel will:

(a) recognize the autonomy and management prerogatives of participating districts.

(b) provide advice, support, training and other assistance in mutually agreed upon ways, such as how to get the change process started, faculty and staff responsibilities, and creating necessary climate.

(c) provide timely and accurate feedback. Throughout the project feedback will be constructive and supportive.

All parties agree to be honest, open and cooperative with each other at all times.

OUTCOMES-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT MODEL

RESEARCH LITERATURE

MISSION: ALL STUDENTS WILL LEARN WELL WHAT SCHOOLS WANT THEM TO LEARN

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE | SOCIOLOGICAL BASE | PSYCHOLOGICAL BASE

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS	BOARD OF EDUCATION	SCHOOL SUPPORT SYSTEMS
STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL	BOARD POLICY	INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES
COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK	BOARD SUPPORT	CURRICULUM ORGANIZATION
PROBLEM SOLVING MODEL	COMMUNITIES	INTENTIONAL SCHOOL PRACTICES
CHANGE FACTORS & PROCESS	NETWORKING	INTENTIONAL CLASSROOM PRACTICES
CULTURE		ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES
CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT MODEL		
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT		

DESIRED STUDENT EXIT BEHAVIORS

1. SELF-ESTEEM AS LEARNER AND PERSON
2. COGNITIVE SKILLS (LOW TO HIGH LEVELS)
3. PROCESS SKILLS (PROBLEM SOLVING, COMMUNICATION, DECISION MAKING, ACCOUNTABILITY, GROUP PROCESS)
4. SELF-DIRECTED LEARNER
5. CONCERN FOR OTHERS

SUMMARY OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The information session for invited school districts was held at Texas Tech. Texas Tech personnel led the discussion, stating that the purpose of the meeting was to explore ways the school districts and Texas Tech could cooperate to improve education. It was explained that a similar three-year project was coming to a close, that a lot had been learned about significant school change and it seemed appropriate to explore the possibility of starting with another group. The "Project Redesign" proposal (above) was distributed. It was noted that the materials were for discussion and clarification purposes, but the contents were fairly firm. Remarks from Texas Tech faculty included the following:

1. What may have been good practice in the past must be scrutinized against what we know today about how young people learn.
2. We are not suggesting experimenting with students. We are talking about putting proven procedures into practice.
3. Tough questions must be asked and answered. This is not a quick fix.
4. There is an ethical issue involved. If you know a practice helps students learn better, you are morally obligated to put it into practice.
5. It will be tough. Administrators will have to be prepared to withstand pressures from teachers, some board members and the community. Change is threatening and difficult.
6. Strong support from the superintendent is absolutely essential if the project is to be successful.

One week after the initial information meeting, those superintendents who were interested in getting involved met again to begin making plans. The proposal statement was again reviewed and discussed. Major points from the discussion included the following.

1. There are three basic aspects: (a) being data driven, (b) following the basic psychological principal of success; we must quit doing things that prohibit or hinder success, (c) following a sound philosophy.
2. The most difficult thing is to change attitudes. Skills are relatively easy to develop.
3. The format for the training will be to bring key teachers and administrators to the Texas Tech campus for information and training. Paperwork will be avoided. Dialogue with colleagues will be emphasized. At some point school board members will have to be involved.
4. It will take time to produce significant results--at least two to three years. We're not running a race, we're building the capacity of an organization.

5. The target is quality and elimination of mediocrity. A public commitment must be made to program improvement.

6. Each school district will normally bring at least the principal and two teachers from each campus to the training sessions.

7. Teachers and administrators will need to grow as professional teammates.

8. Experiences from Crosbyton and Muleshoe, which had already been involved to some extent in similar efforts, indicated that there would be serious opposition from some teachers, administrators, and community members. Time commitments would have to be altered. Continuing training and discussion, involving teachers and administrators together, would be necessary on a weekly basis.

9. School board members must be kept informed and "brought along."

10. The tasks are difficult, but the progress is exciting. The rewards are worth the effort and headaches. Teachers begin to feel and perform like professionals.

Training sessions were conducted about four times per year for administrators and teachers. In addition, the superintendents were involved in planning sessions at least two times each year. At the end of the planned three-year time frame, follow-up activities will be carried out on a reduced scale to help the school districts continue to improve.

This paper will not attempt to describe in detail the various training and development activities carried out during the project. They emphasized familiarization and commitment to the outcomes-based model for school improvement, development of school climate and culture, and understanding of basic concepts necessary to development of appropriate school and classroom practices. The following major concepts and principles were included in various sessions throughout the three-year project. They are in approximate order of presentation, but much review and discussion was necessary to develop a thorough understanding and necessary commitment among the participants.

Philosophical and psychological principles.
A vision for your school--goal setting.
Transformational leadership.
Appropriate school culture and climate.
Role of leadership teams.
Renorming public expectations.
Teacher-administrator role changes and clarification.
Professional growth plans.
Organizational development and change processes.
Conflict resolution.
Discrepancy management.
Organizational hygiene.
Individual and building readiness.

Required openness and honesty, in a professional manner.
Specific school and classroom practices.
Effective communication (individual, group, community).

The group training sessions involved much workshop-type activity, as participants were led to develop common understandings, beliefs, and goals. Teachers and administrators had to learn to be open and honest with each other. Personnel from individual districts shared with those from other districts what was going on in their schools--both successes and problem areas.

At about the midpoint of the project (November 1986) a dinner meeting, including school board members, "celebrated" the progress made in each school district. This proved to be a most worthwhile activity, particularly in building rapport and commitment.

PROJECT RESULTS

At the end of the planned three-year cycle an evaluation helped each district better understand the progress that had been made as a result of their efforts. The evaluation effort took the form of a "mini accreditation visit." It included a small scale self-study, a one-day visit by a team of teachers and administrators from the other districts in the project, and a report by the visitation team. A self-study instrument was developed by Texas Tech personnel for use by each school district. This gave the effort some degree of standardization, although the intent was not to compare the districts. The evaluation effort served to also give direction to plans for future activities to carry out the district improvement goals.

The overall results of the four self studies are shown below. Figures shown are totals for all four districts. There were differences in responses among the four districts, although similarities were much more common than differences.

1. The district has made an open commitment to school improvement. Yes 302 No 5

2. The Outcome-based Development Model is the recognized vehicle for accomplishing school improvement. Yes 300 No 7

3. The instructional staff has had frequent opportunities for explanation and understanding of the Outcome-based Model for school improvement.

Many Opportunities				No Opportunities
1	2	3	4	5
95	121	66	10	3

4. At this point in time, what percent of the staff is committed to make the model successful?

Individual responses varied from 50% to 100%. Averages for the four districts were 68%, 78%, 82% and 82%.

5. List the steps that are in place to further close this gap. How effective are they?

Steps listed included workshops, inservice training, small group meetings, continuous meeting with committee members, keeping staff informed, training for new teachers and paraprofessionals, peer tutoring among teachers, various special programs started, distribution of appropriate professional reading, and other similar efforts.

Responses to the question about effectiveness were generally positive, although some reservations were expressed.

6. District leadership has worked hard to ensure behaviors consistent with transformational leadership.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
100	116	70	11	5

7. Leaders are openly accepting and responsive to feedback regarding their work.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
81	123	76	28	8

8. The climate in this district is receptive to change.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
74	113	101	16	4

9. The largest percentage of the district staff is happy and pleased to be part of this district's growth venture.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
62	121	98	22	5

10. Respect and dignity pervade all portions of the organization.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
53	120	72	39	9

11. The informal organization poses a substantial block to the Outcomes-based Development Model.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
22	59	81	95	35

12. Every member of the professional staff has been challenged to be an active and continuous learner.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
127	97	42	19	6

13. The board of trustees is knowledgeable and supportive.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
92	118	55	22	9

14. The community understands the general nature of the district's improvement model.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
8	62	112	87	28

15. Trust and openness characterize the district's interrelationships.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
18	80	120	59	19

16. Problem solving is successfully practiced at every level in this district.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
24	95	118	45	13

17. There is ample evidence that the district and its staff are actively committed to making the concept of being data driven a reality.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
75	115	72	29	4

18. There is a clear balance between the relationship of the district and the functioning of its individual schools.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
35	93	122	34	10

19. Every member of the professional staff has a clear knowledge of the district's expectations of them and they know precisely what they can expect in terms of support and nurture from the district.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
55	110	80	36	14

20. There is a clear sense of vision which pervades the district and is shared with and among the total professional staff.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
66	116	80	21	10

21. The instructional process is firmly in place.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
100	126	54	11	3

22. All professional staff member have been trained and certified in the use of the instructional process.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
106	118	45	15	8

23. Intentional school practices are in place and are gaining strength through daily use.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
77	128	68	15	5

24. There is substantial evidence that all behaviors and decisions are intentionally directed toward specific outcomes.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
65	143	57	21	5

25. The district's personnel are practicing self-reneval.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
51	129	81	21	7

26. The district has made significant strides toward enabling and empovering staff.

Agree				Disagree
1	2	3	4	5
69	128	76	16	4

The above data indicate that the strongest areas of accomplishment resulting from this project have to do with understanding and implementing the elements of the Outcomes-based Development Model. There seems to be very strong support for the statements having to do with strong leadership, good training, implementation of appropriate school and classroom practices, and school board support.

The areas of greatest difficulty seem to be understanding by the community and trust and openness among the district staff members. Blocks by elements of the informal organization, problem solving skills, and a match between total district and some individual school performances also seem to be significant problem areas.